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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARAMARIBO 000176

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WHA/CAR FOR LAURA LUFTIG, INR FOR BOB CARHART

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NS](#)

SUBJECT: TRIAL TENSIONS RAMP UP AS BOUTERSE AND SANTOKHI
SPAR

REF: A. 2007 PARAMARIBO 127

[1](#)B. 2006 PARAMARIBO 411

Classified By: A.S. Utschig for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite reports that the murder trial of former military strongman Desi Bouterse may not go forward in April 2007, tensions over the trial have been increasing. Members of Bouterse,s National Democratic Party (NDP) issued a series of press statements which many, including Minister of Justice and Police Chandrikapersad Santokhi, took as threatening. More than one implicated the U.S., claiming for example that Santokhi and President Venetiaan would monitor the trial from the safety of the premises of the U.S. Embassy. The discovery of Suriname,s first-ever car bomb on a businessperson,s vehicle did nothing to mitigate the tense atmosphere. As a result, Bouterse and the NDP,s claims that the trial will be unduly disruptive look to finally have some validity. END SUMMARY

The Trial Process: Complicated and Non-Transparent

[1](#)2. (U) Bouterse is accused of the murder of 15 political opponents in 1982. The complicated details of the trial procedure, which are based on the Dutch legal system, differ significantly from procedures in the U.S. A trial consists of three phases. Phase one determines whether a trial is necessary. This phase is complete. In phase two, the majority of evidence and arguments is submitted on paper, prior to any oral arguments, to presiding judges by attorneys on both sides. The judges then review the documents. Attorneys have already submitted these papers to the judges, but judicial review is not complete. The only element of a trial which takes place in an open court setting is the third and final phase: oral testimony and cross-examination of witnesses by both attorneys and judges. This third phase is pending the completion of phase two, and awaited with a mixture of anticipation and apprehension here in Suriname.

Yet another Delay?

[1](#)3. (C) On April 2 the local newspaper of record reported that there is still no predicted start date for the third phase of the trial, as judges have yet to examine the majority of the twelve dossiers of evidence and arguments before they can make a determination of fact. One Embassy source involved in the examination of the evidence confirmed that the trial is unlikely to begin soon. However, observers and participants in this process up to and including Minister

of Justice and Police Chandrikapersad Santokhi, the trial,s biggest public proponent, told embassy officials including the Ambassador that they still expect the trial to begin in the second half of April. If the trial is in fact delayed again, it will be merely the latest set-back for a process which started in 2000.

Mutterings of Conspiracy, Wishes for Amnesty

14. (C) Meanwhile, figures in the NDP have been busy casting doubt on and spreading rumors about the prudence of the government,s course of action in deciding to proceed with the trial, and trying to build support for Bouterse,s amnesty: they plan to propose an amnesty law in parliament. Among the NDP,s outlandish accusations are that the trial venue has been secretly declared international territory in order to facilitate "arrest, deportation, and/or liquidation of fellow citizens." One Bouterse ally told a local newspaper that Bouterse fears "liquidation," and therefore will never appear in court. Members of the Dutch military are supposedly on stand-by in plainclothes. Justice and Police Minister Santokhi took the bait: on April 3 he told the press his Ministry will investigate whether there are "punishable facts" in the press releases: whether they amount to threats, destabilization, or intimidation. Santokhi also said he has decided to put more police on the street in order to increase the feeling of security, and that he will consider joint patrols with the military. He said he thinks the NDP is trying to isolate and attack him personally.

Those Dastardly Americans

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15. (C) The NDP has liberally sprinkled accusations of "North American" complicity into its theories. An open NDP letter to the parliament said the secured trial facility "reminds us of Guantanamo, the North American base in Cuba. There suspected terrorists are held in the most pitiable conditions against all international treaties." This fits a pattern of recent barbs aimed at foreign entities, usually the Dutch or the United States (ref A). Meanwhile, the NDP said in a March 30 press release that it had learned that Santokhi and President Ronald Venetiaan will monitor the trial "in safety behind the walls of the North American Embassy," and the chairperson of its parliamentary faction said that the justice system in Suriname is subordinate to the Dutch and U.S. justice systems, as proved by last year,s Roger Khan incident (ref B).

Mystery Bomb

16. (C) On April 1 Suriname,s first car bomb was found on the underside of the vehicle of an entrepreneur. One editorial appeared saying Suriname is "shocked," that Suriname has entered a "spiral of violence," and that citizens no longer feel safe. However, many ordinary Surinamers seemed unconcerned. In either case, the incident fits nicely into NDP,s accusations that the country is growing more dangerous and unstable. Still, discussion of motives for the bomb remains speculative at this point. When Ambassador and Santokhi discussed the explosives on April 2, Santokhi said he suspects a connection between the explosives and the NDP,s attempt to convince citizens that the trial will make them unsafe.

17. (C) COMMENT: By responding to the NDP,s jibes, Santokhi is playing into its hands, giving credence to NDP accusations that he is steering Suriname down a dangerous path. On the other hand, Santokhi,s decision to make police

security more visible on the street demonstrates that he remains in control of security, a show of decisiveness and leadership that his President, Ronald Venetiaan, would do well to adopt. For the moment the momentum for a trial remains in the government's favor, and Santokhi appears bound and determined to keep it there. Whether he has the resources to make the trial go smoothly remains to be seen, and the NDP is doing its best to make sure that it doesn't.

END COMMENT

SCHREIBER HUGHES